



THE DUTY OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF
ENGLAND, IN TIME OF CONTROVERSY.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF REIGATE,

AT THE VISITATION OF THE

VENERABLE SAMUEL WILBERFORCE,

Archdeacon of Surrey :

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CLERGY :

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This, as being the only reason of its publication, will, it is hoped, protect the writer from any imputation of presumption, to which he might otherwise have been justly liable, in putting forward his own individual opinions at a period already overburthened with theological writings.

Gatton,
11th Nov. 1843.

“ No man can justly blame me for honouring my spiritual mother, the Church of England ; in whose womb I was conceived, at whose breasts I was nourished, and in whose bosom I hope to die.”

[*Archbishop Bramhall's Replication to the Bishop of Chalcedon.*]

S E R M O N .

ST. MATTHEW xviii. 7.

“WOE UNTO THE WORLD BECAUSE OF OFFENCES! FOR IT
MUST NEEDS BE THAT OFFENCES COME; BUT WOE TO
THAT MAN BY WHOM THE OFFENCE COMETH!”

SUCH is the solemn language in which He who is Lord of all, not long after His transfiguration, pronounces the sorrow of the unseen world upon whomsoever should at any time place difficulties in the way of Life, solicit by treacherous counsel His little ones to sin, or by open persecution endeavour to drive them from the faith and to deny before men that they know Him.

Though still “in fashion as a Man,” yet by the Divine Prescience of the everlasting Godhead dwelling in Him, He foresaw—and as He foresaw, so also, for our admonition, He foretold—that so long as the earth should endure, so long causes of

offence must, from time to time, arise ; that until the End should come, and the Destroyer himself be destroyed, the inscrutable Wisdom of Almighty God, for the trial, purification, advancement even, of the Faith, and for the temporal chastisement of sin, would suffer the pride and the passions, the ignorance and frailty of the sons of men, to embarrass the path of Salvation ; to threaten the very fortress of God's truth ; to work upon the infirmities of their brethren, by false and specious doctrines ; now by fear and calamity alarming the timid, and now by fraud and flattery seducing the unstable.

Sad prediction indeed of a sadder necessity ! Offences must needs be, because in the outward and visible Church some must needs be evil ; for until the awful and unknown hour of our Lord's last advent shall arrive—the more awful because unknown—the tares will grow intermingled with the wheat, and some of every kind be gathered into His earthly kingdom.

Not that the prediction created the necessity, nor that the necessity was absolute and causal of the offence : if the necessity had not been eventual and conditional ; if it had been the result of an unalterable decree ; if it had arisen from fate fixed and unavoidable, then, in that case, a woe so mournful had not fallen upon the offender from the sacred lips of Mercy : for punishment would be out of place where the fault is involuntary. The offence cometh not because our Lord foretold

it ; the prophecy is not the instrumental cause of the scandal ; does not take away the freedom of the faculties ; or the liberty of deliberate choice ;* or subject the actions of life to an imperious fate : but our Lord, knowing what was in man, perceived that from impatience of restraint, from want of faith, from hatred of self-discipline and self-subjection, offences would spring forth : or as Saint Luke expresses it, that “it is impossible “but that offences will come”† (that is) that it is not to be expected or imagined (*ἀνένδεκτόν*) that God should so think fit to interpose His power continually, as to hinder, or not permit false doctrines, schisms, controversies, and other the like means of discouraging men in their Christian course, to come into the world to draw men from the Christian doctrines of truth and charity.

And after our Lord had fulfilled the mystery of man's redemption, and returned to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was made, the Apostle to the Gentiles, empowered and acted by God's prophetic Spirit, takes up his glorified Master's emphatic warning, and interprets it, as it were, to the Corinthians, when he tells them, “there must also be heresies among “you, that they which are approved may be made “manifest among you ;”‡ meaning, in this place,

* S. Joan. Chrys. Hom. in S. Matt. vol. II. p. 178, (ed. Field,) cf. Aris. Eth. Nicom. Lib. III. cap. i. et ii.

† Luke xvii. 1. See Hammond ad locum.

‡ St. Chrysostom on I. Cor. xi. 19.

by the word "*heresies*," according to the interpretation of one of the fathers, not those which concern the great doctrines, but only present divisions; as implying, not a separation from the Unity of the Church Catholic, but rather sects and divisions *in* the Church : or to cite the explanation of one of our own commentators,* this necessity of divisions is not absolute, or of God's making ; but only on supposition of the pride and vain glory, strife, envyings, and contentions, which were already in the Church of Corinth, and God's permission that men, so affected, should act according to the dispositions of their own hearts ; as the necessity of diseases arises from intemperance.

And in consequence of these divisions and controversies originating—not in God's design, but—in human frowardness, or human infirmity ; He, who from evil still educes good, overrules them to this one beneficial purpose, at least, viz. that "they" "that are approved" i. e. those who have been tried (and, like precious ore, purified from dross) will, in and through them, be made more conspicuously manifest, partially even here ; fully hereafter.

The ample records of the Church's History bear no equivocal testimony to the literal accomplishment of our Lord's prediction. As age after age is brought before us, age after age affords a practical commentary on the truth, that offences must needs be. Even in the earlier Church, the inter-

* Whitby on I. Cor. xi. 19.

mission of outward wrong was ever the signal for internal disunion. During the first three centuries perhaps, while Christianity was struggling for a precarious existence, controversy might possibly have been a little less frequent, and a little less violent, than it was afterwards: but from the moment that the emperor of the world received—if he did receive, or rather tolerate—the Gospel; from the moment the Cross of the once despised Nazarene was raised in honour above the secular diadem, it broke forth with unrestrained intensity. Nothing was secure against its inroads. The most sacred mysteries of Redemption—points which, on account of their transcendent sublimity, one would rather receive with adoring reverence, than attempt to question or define—were discussed with licentious freedom: and the Incarnation of the very Son of God; His Manhood and Godhead; the Divinity and personality of the Holy Ghost; freewill: the origin of evil: nay, even the observance of times and seasons*—things, if not in themselves indifferent, at least not of primary importance—were alternately impugned and upheld with a vehemence and acrimony, distressing even in remembrance.

I am not saying, that controversy had no beneficial results: I am not saying, that by the agency of controversy, Christianity was not more fully developed; nor that the inherent vigour and di-

* See Bingham's *Antiquities* vol. VII. pp. 85—104, (ed. 1840.)
S. Aug. *Januario*. Ep. 118.

vine power of the Gospel were not eminently displayed, as It triumphed successively over the heartless obstinacy of Judaism, and the intricacies of Gentile Philosophy; on the contrary, I believe that the mighty purposes of God's all-wise Providence were thus, in a measure, wrought out: but while the long induction of facts, which Ecclesiastical History places before us, bears, as I observed, clear evidence to the fulfilment of our Saviour's prophecy; while it corroborates Saint Paul's teaching, that through divisions, though only incidentally, the righteous are made manifest; one cannot but deplore the sad dispensation that so for man's salvation it must needs be; nor help regarding these moral convulsions somewhat with the same feelings, probably, as men experience when they contemplate those terrific perturbations of the material creation—the earthquake and tornado of the tropics—which, in their merciless fury, devastate the earth, while at the same time they purify the atmosphere, and restore, it may be, the equilibrium of the universe.

If we avert our attention from the sorrowful experience of the past; less sorrowful the prospect of the present can hardly be thought to appear.

Though it would be improper to do more than allude to the divisions which at this day vex and harass Christ's Holy Catholic Church—so numerous and so conflicting, that many an one might be pardoned for saying, in Jacob's words, “ Except
“ the God of my father, the God of Abraham and

“ the Fear of Jacob had been with me, surely thou
 “ hadst sent me away now empty ”*—yet doubtless as it is right, so far as in us lies, to soften down their asperity and, if possible, to arrest their progress, so is it also prudence to gather profit from their prevalence.

An eventful period in the Church’s history is ever designated the Church’s crisis ; and whenever danger appears, to man’s thinking, imminent, the Church’s peril hangs on every lip.

I may be wrong ; if I know myself, I am far from saying I am right ; but I always think that on such a vital question as the stability and duration of Christ’s Church, it is extremely difficult to say precisely what may or may not be a crisis ; to point to one season as more critical, properly speaking, than another. Of course it is not meant that there never has been, nor ever again will be, a crisis—that there is no turning point in the tide of human affairs. If the cup be full, a falling drop will cause it to overflow, but who shall say *when* the drop will fall. Dangers, apparently great, pass away we know not how or why : disastrous consequences often arise from apparently insignificant causes ; to a watchful eye every thing relating to the Church’s existence will appear important—for example—If in the dawn of the Gospel day, the hostility of the Cæsars presented a crisis of the very last moment to the Christian Faith ; the cessation of their hostility was not less

* Genesis xxxi. 42.

momentous: so again the times when the eclectic philosophy of Alexandria, or the subtleties of the Arian controversy perplexed and distracted the human mind, were highly critical: the contest for power between the Secular and Spiritual Authorities in the *dark* ages, (as we speak) was critical; so was the Reformation, with all the blessings that attended it. Innumerable instances of the same kind might obviously be adduced, but where all seem so important, it is not easy to give prominence to any.

Generally speaking therefore (of course there must be exceptions) but generally speaking, it seems extremely difficult to say, that this epoch in the Church's destinies is less pregnant with danger than that; that any one given period has been, or is likely to be more critical than another. What I feel is, that every day, as it rolls onward to join the vast ocean of past eternity, places before us, in strong light, some *public* duty as peculiarly suitable to "the present distress,"* or *necessity*, as Saint Paul speaks; as being, for the time present, more emphatically incumbent upon every member of Christ's body mystical.

And if I may offer an opinion only as to the great *public* duty which the aspect and colouring of the religious horizon of our day appears to indicate as especially necessary; I should, at once and without hesitation, declare that duty to be a calm self-possessed avowal of unshaken fidelity

* I. Cor. vii. 26.

to the *pure Apostolical, Primitive, nor less Primitive because Reformed, † branch of Christ's universal Church now, by God's goodness, established among us ; fidelity to her own proper teaching ; fidelity to her Liturgy, Ritual, Articles, and Documents ; not a blind acquiescence—blind acquiescence I mean even in this case as opposed to a well informed and well regulated faith—not a hesitating, partial, and merely legal adherence to her ; but a frank, manly, cordial, reasonable deference and submission to her judgment—the judgment (that is) of the best and wisest of ages past ; ‡ a submission evincing the dutifulness of a disciple, and the piety of a son.

* The second of the Canons of 1603, declares the Church of England to be a true and apostolical Church ; and the first, that the King's authority in matters Ecclesiastical is the same that Christian Emperors had in the primitive Church.

† There is no greater absurdity stirring this day in Christendom, than that the Reformation of an old corrupted Church must be taken for the building of a new. And, were this not so, we should never be troubled with that idle and impertinent question of theirs ; Where was your Church before Luther ? For it was just there where theirs is now : one and the same Church still, no doubt of that : one in substance, but not one in condition of state and purity ; their part of the same Church remaining in corruption, and our part of the same Church under Reformation. The same Naaman, and he a Syrian still, but leprous with them, and cleansed with us. [Archbishop Laud's Conference with Fisher, the Jesuit. Epistle dedicatory.]

‡ “ Quod pluribus, quod sapientibus, quod omnibus videtur : ” that is Aristotle's rule ; and it is a rule of nature ;

For as from early youth we have, some of us, been bound to her by the lasting obligation of solemn vows, and, all of us by the endearing ties of unspeakable blessings and benefits received ; so also is she indeed *to us* the mystical Spouse of Christ our Saviour ; the visible representative of her Invisible Lord ; the outward channel of His inward grace ; one with Him ; ever there where He is ; a true member of the body of which He is the Head ; a province of the kingdom of which He is the Sovereign.

All her blessings develop themselves from HIM as the one centre of her system, and are harmoniously interwoven in Him, as her Lord, her Life, her Light, her Glory, and her Salvation.

His Word is the touchstone of all her confessions ; His meritorious death, and His alone efficacious intercession, the ground of all her hopes ; His Holy Spirit the only source of her holiness.

He is the living and life-giving principle of all her ordinances ; Him we believe to be truly present in both His sacraments ;* in baptism, so that

every thing puts on a degree of probability, as it is witnessed by wise men ; by many wise men ; by all wise men : and it is Vincentius Lirinensis' great rule of truth, " quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus ;" and he who goes against what is said always, and everywhere, and by all Christians, had need have a new revelation, or an infallible spirit ; or he hath an intolerable pride and foolishness of presumption."

[Bishop Taylor's Works, (ed. Heber) vol. vi. p. 522.]

* Juelli Apol. Ecc. Angl. (Cantab. 1838.) pp. 31, 32.
[Christum enim asserimus, vere sese præsentem exhibere in

we may put Him on ; in the Eucharist, that we may feed on Him spiritually and by faith ; and from His cross and precious blood have life eternal ; and this, we say, is done not in a cold perfunctory way, but really and truly : for neither is that faith vain which embraces Christ ; nor is that received coldly, which is received by faith mentally and spiritually ; for in those holy mysteries Christ Himself is offered and delivered to the faithful, that we may know indeed that we are now flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone, and that He dwells in us and we in Him.

“The Religion of our Church* (says Bishop Taylor, in His Dissuasive from Popery) is, therefore, certainly primitive and apostolic, because it teaches us to believe the whole Scriptures of the Old and New Testament,† and nothing else, as matter of faith ; and, therefore, unless there can

sacramentis suis ; in Baptismo, ut Eum induamus : in Cœna, ut Eum fide et spiritu comedamus, et de Ejus cruce ac sanguine habeamus vitam æternam : idque dicimus non perfunctorie et frigide, sed re ipsa et vere fieri. Etsi enim Christi corpus dentibus et faucibus non attingimus, Eum tamen fide, mente, spiritu tenemus et premimus. Neque vero vana ea fides est quæ Christum complectitur, nec frigide percipitur, quod mente, fide, et spiritu percipitur. Ita enim nobis in illis mysteriis, Christus Ipse totus, quantus quantus est, offertur et traditur, ut vere sciamus, esse jam nos carnem de Ejus carne, et os de ossibus Ejus ; et Christum in nobis manere, et nos in Illo.]

* Taylor's Works, (Heber's ed.) VOL. x. pp. 129, 130, 131.

† Article VI.—“ Of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.”

be new Scriptures, we can have no new matters of belief, no new articles of faith.* Whatsoever we cannot prove from thence, we disclaim it as not deriving from the fountains of our Saviour—foris est—it belongs not to Christ.”

“We do also believe the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene with the additions of Constantinople, and that which is commonly called the Symbol of Saint Athanasius; and the four first General Councils are so entirely admitted by us, that they, together with the plain words of Scripture, are made the rule and measure of judging heresies among us; and in pursuance of these, it is commanded by our Church (Canons and Injunctions of Queen Elizabeth, A. D. 1571) that the Clergy shall never teach anything as the matter of faith religiously to be observed, but that which is agreeable to the Old and New Testament, and collected out of the same doctrine by the ancient fathers and catholic Bishops of the Church.

. To these [that is, the Holy Scriptures] we also add, not as authors and finishers, but as helpers of our faith, and heirs of the doctrine apostolical, the sentiments and catholic doctrine of the Church of God in the ages next after the Apostles. Not that we think ourselves bound to every private opinion, even of

* *Ecclesia ex sacris et canonicis Scripturis ostendenda est; quæ ex illis non ostendi potest, Ecclesia non est.*

Ibi quæramus Ecclesiam, ibi decernamus causam nostram.

[S. Aug. de Unit. Eccles. cap. iv. et cap. iii.]

a primitive bishop and martyr " * we admit " the fathers as admirable helps for the understanding of the Scriptures, and as good testimony of the doctrine, delivered from their forefathers down to them, of what the Church esteemed the way of Salvation."

And if from the frame, substance, and edifice of the Church, we turn to weigh, for a moment, the character and qualifications of the great, good, and pious men who, under God, and as instruments in His hands, were permitted to design and frame it; we shall find, as I believe, no little reason to estimate, according to its true value, the richness of the legacy they have bequeathed to us, sealed, as it was, in more than one instance, by the life blood of the testators. I quote the words of one† not much addicted to exaggerated eulogium—and they who are conversant with the history of events contemporaneous with, and subsequent to the æra of the Reformation, will have, perhaps, little difficulty in subscribing to his opinions.

"From those whose works we know," (says Dr. Hey, speaking of the Reformers) "we can judge of the rest: and it seems sufficiently clear, that the persons who compiled our Articles, were men of the first *ability*:—as *scholars* (if we except a few,

* "Because any number that is less than all does not prove a Catholic consent." [p. 130.]

† Hey's Lectures, VOL. II. BOOK IV. Introduction to an Exposition of the XXXIX Articles. SEC. III. pp. 204, 205. The passage is too long to be inserted in full.

though mere linguists ought not to be reckoned) we are mere children to them. The Scriptures they were conversant in to a degree, of which few now have any conception (at least so I believe): Ecclesiastical History of facts and opinions lay open before them : yet they were not mere scholars, nor monks, nor monkish men ; but skilled in government, knowing men and manners, liberal in their behaviour ; free from all fanaticism ; full of probity, yet guided in their measures by prudence.”—And speaking of the Articles, he says, “ If it be asked why men do not commonly *esteem* our Articles.....? I would answer..... really the chief thing which hinders us from esteeming them, is our own *ignorance*.... We proceed in a petulant manner, reasoning superficially, and despising what we ought to venerate.”

God forbid the day should ever come, when it shall be thought a light thing, to tamper, according to arbitrary and unsustained opinions of individuals, with our Church’s formularies ; in a fanciful, loose, unguarded way, to complain of their redundancies on the one hand, or their deficiencies on the other.

Decrepitude and faintness of heart will, I am sure, fall upon us, (a due punishment for an almost profane thoughtlessness) when once we shall have learned to despise the time honoured names of her great Apologists ; and to desert, as we think, for a more favourable position, the vantage ground

on which they waged the war of our faith. We may well think we cannot emulate their learning, nor aspire to the deep devotion which animated and supported them in their hour of trial—but each of us may, if so we be minded, though it be at a distance and only after our measure, follow cheerfully in their train.

Nor is it less our duty than our wisdom to do so.

Our duty—because from no outward compulsion, but, freely and voluntarily, we have taken upon ourselves her ministry, and vowed to become faithful interpreters of *her* teaching. Our wisdom—because the difficulties which surround the functions of our ministry are, God doth know, neither insignificant, nor rare. It is weakness to close our eyes against their magnitude; not to grapple with them is, like ancient Ephraim, to turn back in the day of battle. Increasing years, and multiplied experience, and, alas! painful failures too, have, it may be, taught some among us, that, under God, the most efficient mode of overcoming them in our faint endeavours (at their best, faint) to set forth the great glory of the Everlasting God, and to set forward the Salvation of men is, if I may use Saint Paul's often quoted but almost untranslatable words, ἀληθευεῖν ἐν ἀγαπῇ, to speak the truth in love, or, to cite the words of one* himself not unskilled in the difficulties of the priesthood; when men have wandered from the

* S. Joan. Chrys. De Sacerdotio, LIB. II. cap. iv.

direct faith, the shepherd hath need of industry, fortitude, and patience; for it is not possible to drag by force, or compel by fear, but rather by moral suasion to lead them back to the truth from which they have fallen: and even the heathen moralist† can tell us, that they, towards whom force is used, hate, as despoiled of a right; they who have been persuaded, love, as receiving a boon. Assuredly, (at least, so I believe) assuredly, the moment we cast away the panoply which our Church affords us, and trust to *our own* unsupported individual strength, our difficulties will increase a thousand fold and multiply in proportion to our weakness.

Blessed be God, even in the stormy and devious wilds of controversy, she hath many a landmark by day; many a fair beacon by night, to guide us on our heavenward way: and thanks be to Him, our office lies more in teaching from Holy Scripture, under her direction, what is, than in warning against what is not, Truth; in pointing out what is right, as the great preservative from error. That seems the best tribute of love and duty to our Spiritual Mother, the Church of England—in whose bosom, our forefathers, our parents, brethren, friends, children, have lived and died; and, as we hope, entered upon rest—to identify ourselves, in spirit, with what seems to be the spirit of her teaching: labouring day by day, (content and willing so to labour, known or un-

* Xenophon. Memo. Socratis, LIB. I. cap. ii.

known, requited or unrequited)—to become faithful exponents of her doctrines and polity, as they are ; grateful for that we have ; seeking neither to explain away, nor add thereto, according to any ideal notion of what a Church should be. Certainly the talent unemployed, or misemployed, will, one day, be a weary burthen. Certainly we dare not, neither are we entitled, at least if the Gospel rule be true, to look for less, if less we need ; or more, if more be desirable, until we have made long unwearied labourious trial of the rich talent God has trusted to our keeping. May He enable us, in all judgment, and right-mindedness, and honesty, and goodness of heart, to set forth our Church's claims upon her children, in their vitality, vigour, and simplicity.

Our vows to our Church bind us, as has been shewn, to instruct the people out of the Scriptures ; and (as in this discourse I hope I have proved) it is no unmeaning panegyric, to say, that while she is truly scriptural, she retains the purest and the freshest of the early prime of Christianity ; that as she is at present constituted, she is truly Catholic, yet, at the same time, Protestant ; in the one case, as has been frequently said, essentially ; in the other, only accidentally, on account of errors in other Churches ; that as she is at present constituted ; in other words ; as being under her present constitution, God's sacred and precious gift to this People and Country, she contains,

as such, within herself, enough to satisfy all the mysterious longings after immortality, inborn in the human soul ; enough to replenish the occasional wanings of the deepest piety ; to warm the most ardent imagination ; to cheer the most desponding soul.

And thus, while we labour, in meet terms, to set forth the varied excellencies of our Church ; May God enable us, by His grace, under whatever circumstances, to adorn and beautify them, by innocence, purity, blamelessness of life. Then may we hope, dim as our hope may be, for the unhallowed jarring of earthly warfare to cease : the necessity of offences gradually to weaken : and unity once more to retrace her footsteps in our land.—Unity—not merely outward peace ; a hollow heartless truce, which every slight mischance and every inconsiderable accident may rupture : not a tacit understanding to waive contested points ; a cold uncharitable intolerant sufferance of fundamental differences—but Unity : that true interior, essential, and intrinsic concord, or oneness (*ἐνότης*) of heart and affection which flows from God the Father, as its divine fountain head ; from God the Son, as the fruit of His mysterious incarnation and precious death ; from God the Holy Spirit, as its divine principle ; from the Church as its outward and secondary, but still divinely appointed, channel : unity of origin, unity of faith, unity of hope ; unity of sacraments, unity of discipline,

unity of charity ; without which last, unity is hopeless—" Endeavouring to keep the unity of
 " the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one
 " body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one
 " hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one
 " baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above
 " all, and through all, and in you all."*

Nor is this unity an unreal thing, a being neither of time nor place, having no existence save in the dreams of a disordered imagination ; may we not rather believe it to be that which, just before His last hour of more than mortal agony, our Blessed Saviour entreated with such sublime earnestness and pathos of His Father, when He prayed " that they all may be one ; as Thou Father
 " art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be
 " one in us I in them, and Thou in Me,
 " that they all may be made perfect in One,
 " and that the world may know that Thou hast
 " sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me " ? †

Wherefore, as time runs onward bringing us nearer and nearer to the last issue of this feeble world, May God, of His goodness make us know, and feel that our highest blessedness, here below, is to be true branches of the Living Vine ; " sincere members of that Catholic society of true believers and faithful servants of Christ, diffused

* Eph. iv. 3—6.

† St. John xvii. 21, 22, 23.

throughout all ages, dispersed throughout all countries, whereof part doth sojourn on earth, part doth reside in heaven, part is not yet extant ; but all whereof is described in the Register of divine Pre-ordination, and shall all be re-collected and glorified at the Resurrection of the Just.”*

* Barrow's Works, (ed. 1722) VOL. I. p. 760.

